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Statements and speeches

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE JAMES TAYLOR, Q.C.
MINISTER OF COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES
TO THE ONTARIO LEGISLATURE, NOVEMBER 22, 1976.

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Publications

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATION
OF THE HURONIA REGIONAL CENTRE, ORILLIA

Mr. Speaker, events at Huronia Regional Centre early in April of this year prompted community concern and questions in this House. On April 27th, accompanied by the Assistant Deputy Minister for Developmental Resources, I made an unannounced and unscheduled visit to Orillia to the Huronia Regional Centre. Following that visit, and on the basis of further inquiries initiated by myself, I determined that there should be a thorough and comprehensive independent inquiry into the management and operation of the Huronia Regional Centre.

Following this decision, it took approximately three weeks to locate and secure the acceptance of a thoroughly qualified, independent investigator to conduct the inquiry. Accordingly, on June 1st, I asked Dr. Joseph W. Willard to undertake this inquiry and to report to me on his findings.

Dr. Willard submitted that report to me last week. Arrangements were made to print copies of it during this past weekend, and I am taking this first opportunity to table the entire document in this House for the benefit of the members and the general public. While it has taken a little longer than originally was anticipated to

produce this report, when the members have had a chance to review it I am sure they will agree with me that the additional time required by Dr. Willard has been well spent.

Dr. Willard has conducted a searching enquiry into a very difficult and complex operation. As he points out, the Huronia Regional Centre represents, in a sense, a community of some 3,000 people including residents and staff. The multiplicity of problems which inevitably arise in a community of that size are never simple and straightforward. Fortunately for us, Dr. Willard displays in his report that rare combination of analytical ability and depth of understanding of human relations which have enabled him to outline the problems with clarity and simplicity and to propose solutions which are reasonable and to the point.

Members will note that Dr. Willard has made some 69 separate recommendations. Obviously, because I have had the report only for a few days, I have not been able to develop detailed responses to all of them for today. However, I would like to make a few general remarks in response to some of the topics to which they refer. For example, I am pleased to say that my colleague, the Minister of Health, has already agreed to undertake with me an immediate review of the recommendations concerning the provision of psychiatric services, with a view to

inaugurate insofar as is feasible, the special psychiatric units under the Mental Health Act which are being recommended.

With respect to the signing out and self-discharge of residents to the community, a matter which has caused considerable concern in the Orillia area, particularly, I am quite prepared to proceed immediately towards the implementation of the recommendations for determining which residents are capable of travelling freely within the community, and what would constitute appropriate supervision for the others. As well, I am prepared to see implemented an appropriate inhouse mechanism for ensuring adequate preparation and support for those residents who decide to leave the facility prematurely.

I see much merit in the recommendations concerning resident abuse and staff discipline, particularly in the suggestion that an "ombudsman" function be established so that independent review of allegations of abuse will be assured.

Recognizing the complexities of administering a facility the size of Huronia, and the difficulty of reorienting such an institution to the new philosophy of provision of co-ordinated community based services for the mentally retarded, Dr. Willard has made some very positive recommendations concerning structure and organization. I have already taken some preliminary steps towards the implementation of some of these. In particular, I have

agreed that a change of Administrator at the Centre is required for the reasons which Dr. Willard outlines. In addition, I have asked that priority be given to investigating the feasibility of adopting the four-branch structure at Huronia as recommended.

The need for improving communications and working relationships with the parents of the residents and the community at large is certainly recognized. Accordingly, I am prepared to accept the recommendations concerning the strengthening of the liaison function, both from an organizational standpoint and on the basis of the establishment of a community based Centre Advisory Committee.

With respect to the recommendations concerning planning for the future, I have already stated on numerous occasions my Ministry's complete support for the consultative planning process which has been established through the District Working Groups.

As Dr. Willard so correctly points out, it will take some time to implement all of the changes, including those affecting the physical plant, which will be necessary to allow Huronia Regional Centre to adjust from its hundred year tradition of being essentially a segregated total care institution to become a functional part of a comprehensive community based system of services and facilities for the retarded. While much progress has already been made, implementation of the majority of Dr. Willard's recommendations will do much to hasten that progress. For copies of the report contact Communications Branch, Hepburn Block, Queen's Park, Toronto, telephone 965-7825.